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- 1 Outline of Studies in Andover Theolog. Soc.
- 2 Letter of Dr Phillip to Soc. of Inquiry. Sanct.
- 3 Renunciations of Popery by S. B. Smith.
- 4 Four Propositions against the A. M. Society
by Dr. J. L. Wilson
- 5 A True & complete narration of the proceedings of the Synod of Phila^a relative to A. Barn
- 6 Dr. Huggins letter on Revivals to Dr. Sprague
- 7 Dr. Huggins letter to Rev. A. D. Eddy.
- 8 Papers relative to the resignation of
Dr. Laneaway at Alleghany Town.
- 9 Dr. Weeks letter on Protracted meetings
- 10 An essay on Church government
by Alexander Miller.
- 11 A correct narrative &c by Wm. L. McCall
- 12 Minutes of the Convention at Pittsburg
- 13 A letter to Dr. Bishop by Dr. J. L. Wilson.
- 14 A brief answer &c by Rev. A. Peters.
- 15 The rule of Faith, By Bishop Onder-
donck.



THE

R U L E O F F A I T H ;

A C H A R G E

TO THE

CLERGY

OF THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IN THE

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA;

DELIVERED IN ST. JAMES' CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, MAY 22, 1833, AT THE OPENING OF
THE CONVENTION.

BY THE RIGHT^d REV. HENRY U. ONDERDONK, D. D.

ASSISTANT BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1833



THE
RULE OF FAITH;
A CHARGE, &c.

MY REV. BRETHREN,

IT may at first appear singular that, in all the period since the Reformation, no approach has been effected between any of the Protestant churches and that of Rome, and that no ecclesiastical body has found some middle ground to occupy. A little inquiry however will show the reason why this separation remains undiminished. The two parties build on different foundations—the Protestant, on scripture—the Romanist,* on tradition, and on scripture as interpreted by tradition, that sense only being allowed which the church of Rome declares to be the one always received. The one takes the word of God from the mouth of God—the other from the mouth of the church, or rather of a church, one of the several churches in christendom. And the Protestant allows an appeal to an authority extraneous to his own party, while the Romanist keeps the issue before his own party as the sole judge. It is not wonderful therefore, that even three centuries have produced no approximation between these two portions of the christian world.

A difference of opinion so decided and so lasting is always a proper subject of consideration by either party. The point at issue is connected also, if not with all, at least with the more important differences between us and the church of Rome: not indeed that tradition, rightly gathered and interpreted, decides for the latter; but if scripture be made supreme, we have “walls and bulwarks” for our faith that are more secure and more accessible by those who seek their defence. I purpose therefore investigating this fundamental point, THE RULE OF FAITH, in my present Charge to the Clergy of this Diocese.

Protestants and Romanists commence their controversy, as I have

* The author begs leave to disclaim all intention of giving offence in the use of the appellation ‘Romanist.’ On the principle that a church or denomination may assume what name it pleases, he would willingly use that of ‘Catholic;’ but as the members of the church of Rome claim for their communion exclusive catholicity, it cannot be conceded.

remarked, with, in one respect, no common ground. In another respect however, there is the one which no human intellect can justly decline—common sense, and the deductions of sound reasoning. To these must be our appeal, in trying this fundamental issue.

This issue, as I have intimated, is concerning the authority of scripture in matters of religion. The Romanists “admit” the scriptures, but only in the “sense which the holy mother church has held and does hold,” meaning their own church, which they declare to be “the mother and mistress of all churches.”* Protestants admit the scriptures without this authoritative restriction of their sense, leaving them to be interpreted like other ancient books; the sense held by one or more of the Fathers, by the church at large, by the church of Rome, or by other churches, being allowed among other grounds of interpretation, as past or existing construction is used as a help in expounding works not sacred.

The Romanists “admit” also what they call “the apostolic and ecclesiastical *Traditions*,” as distinct from scripture, and placing them first in their creed.† In so far as this refers to the evidence of the genuineness of the books of scripture, this part of their creed is to be allowed, in the same sense as the tradition is to be allowed which attests the work of any ancient author; there being, however, much more and stronger proof of this sort for the inspired than for uninspired compositions of like antiquity.

And here I may first notice one of the primary arguments of the Romanist in favour of a reliance on tradition—that we take the scriptures themselves on traditional authority. Such is the fact, yet the inference is unsound; for the nature of the sort of tradition which brings us the scriptures, is very different from that of the sort of tradition which is our principal subject of consideration. Let an illustration be taken from the transaction in which we are now engaged. Some of my hearers will probably communicate to their friends the substance of portions of my remarks, to them as yet oral—but will they not be liable to mistake? the contrary is not to be supposed. The Charge, however, according to a rule of the Convention, will be published; and there will be no doubt of the genuineness of the copies. In both cases there will be some of the first links of tradition: yet how different in regard to certainty, the links between the speaker and his hearers, and them and their friends, and the link between the manuscript and the printed edition—how difficult, to verify accurately oral communication—how easy, to verify a written or printed document! And how unsound is the argument, which, in the similar cases of the tradition of the oral gospel, and the tradition attesting the genuineness of scripture, would ascribe infallibili-

* See the Creed added to the Nicene, and set forth by Pope Pius IV.

† See the Creed of Pius IV.

ty to the former, because the latter is next to infallible!—The fundamental principle on which the books of the New Testament were received was not the comparing of their contents with the oral tradition on the same subjects, and allowing their authority if they agreed with it—though this might have been to some extent a subordinate test—but the notoriety of their being ‘delivered’ for keeping as of inspired authorship, and the proof that the several books, or the copies of them, were genuine. After any book of scripture was once so delivered and received, its acceptance was a perpetually visible fact, not dependant on hearsay or tradition; it maintained its standing by constant possession and constant presence; and the only subsequent testimony in its behalf was that of the correctness of the successive copies. This testimony was thenceforth the only tradition it required—the testimony that a certain *book* was genuine—very different from the testimony that a certain *conversation* was held some years or some generations before. The authority of the great English document called Magna Charta is made evident, not from the tenor of the conversations or negotiations that are said to have occurred between King John and his barons, but from the tradition which attests the written record of the document itself. This distinction is founded on the nature of the two kinds of testimony, or rather of their respective subjects, the difference between which I shall immediately develop more fully. And to say, that because they both are tradition they must be equally certain, is as unsound as to say, that because they both are testimony, they are testimony of the same grade and value.

The oral and the written gospel both rest on the fact that something was “delivered” for keeping; and hence they both are called “traditions” or things delivered.* The proof that those who delivered this gospel gave it under the security of inspiration constitutes the branch of sacred learning called the Evidences of Christianity; with which we have at present no concern; our discussion being merely this—where may the tradition or matter delivered be most securely found, in the scriptural, or in the oral transmission of it, which also is called tradition? There is no doubt that the Koran was delivered for keeping; and though it has no evidences of being the dictate of inspiration, it yet has been transmitted as delivered. Nor is there any doubt that a rite of sacrifice was anciently delivered for keeping; but that tradition has preserved it faithfully no one believes.—The first delivery for keeping, whether of the written or the oral gospel, was, I add, a very superior tradition to the tradition which keeps the things delivered—the one was the tradition giving, the other is the tradition preserving. And, of the latter sort, the tradition which preserves scripture, or attests the genuineness

of its successive copies, is very different from the tradition which preserves orally, or professes so to preserve, the gospel once orally delivered. Much discrimination is necessary in the use of a word of such various meaning. (See Note at the end.)

At present we are concerned with tradition in the inferior of the senses last adverted to—that tradition of which it is alleged that it has handed down, by means other than the canonical scriptures, what Christ and his inspired servants taught by other methods than these writings. This tradition is usually called Oral, having been at the first oral chiefly, though committed to writing, or said to have been so, at subsequent periods, by the Fathers, by Councils, and otherwise, whether partially or totally we need not here inquire. This tradition the Romanist is commanded, by the Council of Trent, to receive with the scriptures, and “with equal affection of piety and reverence.”

This tradition is meant of course in the declaration of the church of Rome, that scripture is to be admitted “according to that sense which the mother church (so called) has held and does hold.” Tradition, it is said, decides the sense of scripture—tradition, as handed down by the church, and as “held” or declared by the church of Rome at any given time.

Tradition is not explicitly declared to be infallible, in the Creed already quoted, that of Pius IV. This however appears to be meant, as it has exclusively the office of interpreting scripture. And Romanists affirm that it is; i. e. that their church, acting as the dispenser of traditional light, is an infallible judge in matters of faith, including controversies about the sense of the canonical records of the word of God.

Such an assertion is different, essentially, from the one, that tradition, discreetly used, may afford help in interpreting those records, as one means among several.

Here then, I repeat, is the fundamental question—shall the scriptures be interpreted on ordinary principles, including tradition as an aid—or shall tradition, as recognised by the church of Rome, be the sole interpreter? This I regard as the commencement of the controversy, because we both agree to “admit” the letter of the scriptures acknowledged by both to be canonical. The mode of deciding between ‘various readings,’ so called, and the question concerning the books called apocryphal, for none of which a place in the New Testament is claimed, are not only secondary matters in this stage of the argument, but cannot be entered upon till the infallibility of the church of Rome is established or refuted; for on this depends, in the Romanist’s opinion, the authority in these several cases. The letter of the canonical books allowed by both parties affords us scripture, to be compared with tradition, and to be appealed to concerning the claims of tradition. At that point therefore is

the dividing mark between our agreement and disagreement—and *there* begins our controversy.

Beyond this point, the appeal is to common sense and sound reasoning, there being no other common ground. But before proceeding to this appeal, some further remarks may be added.—The Rule of Faith professed by both Protestants and Romanists is, properly speaking, what Christ and his inspired servants taught. Tradition therefore is not in itself a rule of faith, but rather a rule or means for ascertaining what is the Rule of Faith. And scripture is another rule or means for ascertaining what is the Rule of Faith. Is then tradition, deciding authoritatively the sense of the letter of scripture, without permitting scripture to speak for itself, the only or the best means of ascertaining what Christ and his inspired servants taught? Or, shall not scripture declare the sense of its own letter as freely as other books, unfettered by any final authority from without? and is not this the preferable means of ascertaining the instruction of Christ and his inspired servants? The issue is between scripture and tradition, as distinct and opposing claimants. The Romanist will perhaps allege that he uses tradition and scripture both; but the Protestant may say the same. The difference is, that the one makes tradition the superior instrument for reaching the Rule of Faith, while the other makes scripture the superior instrument. The one, looking to scripture for the letter only, and to tradition for the sense of that letter, regards the former as a dependent revelation, useless for christian teaching without the latter; the other, looking to scripture, as to any other book, for the sense of its own letter, regards it as an independent revelation, and tradition as having become of little or no value without it. The issue therefore is between tradition and scripture—which is the most secure means of preserving truth?

In entering on this question, Romanists make a common-sense appeal, in order to prove that tradition, of the kind I have particularly mentioned, the successive instructions of successive parents and successive pastors, must be and must remain correct. Each one teaches accurately and faithfully what himself was taught, and thus all are taught the same things, and the last in the succession receives the same lesson that was revealed to the first. As the things thus communicated are extensively known, their notoriety contributes to their being faithfully transmitted. And the agreement of christians of various countries in their traditions, is a further proof of their genuineness. Such is the argument of the Romanist on this point.

The Protestant constructs a not dissimilar argument in favour of scripture, using tradition, as I have said, though not of the same kind. Scripture is transmitted by successive copies of the inspired writings, each transcriber presenting accurately and faithfully what is contained in the manuscript before him. As the copies are numerous, the fidelity

of each fresh one is secured by the notoriety of their contents. And as copies are made in various countries, their agreement is a further proof of their being genuine.

Similar as are these two arguments in their structure, the quality of their respective materials is very different.

It is not true that tradition is the same among churches of different countries. For example; the Greek, Armenian, Syrian and Coptic churches do not agree with the church of Rome in regard to the traditions before us—that the latter is “the mother and mistress of all churches,” and that the scriptures are to be interpreted in that sense only which she “holds” or declares. All churches however agree substantially in their copies of scripture.

This fact shows likewise that the notoriety of traditions may be much overrated, or that it does not make their conveyance secure, but that spurious traditions (one or other being such when they are contradictory) may also be notorious. There is no fact, however, of a similar kind, to affect the value of notoriety in preserving written truth.

The remaining point in the two arguments mentioned is the comparative *fitness* of tradition and scripture for the faithful transmission of truth. And here I shall offer a common-sense, though figurative illustration, which appears to me as just as it is apt.

Tradition professes to be a stream from a fountain. The fountain was the oral teaching of Christ and his inspired servants, or such of their teaching as was distinct from the scriptures written by the latter. The stream is the oral transmission of the things so taught, or said to have been taught; including also extra-scriptural records of them.

Scripture likewise professes to be a stream from a fountain. The fountain was the written teaching of the inspired servants of Christ, forming the christian scriptures. The stream is formed by the successive transcripts of the books so written.

The channel for the stream of tradition is the human mind. Each successive parent, pastor, or other teacher, transmits it as he understood it at first, or as he understands it afterwards, and as he remembers it—an imperfect channel obviously, having many deviations in its course. It is also an open channel, receiving other currents, such as fancies, opinions, and prejudices of various kinds, at every point of its progress—and having in its track hidden springs, of weak motives to concede or to modify the truth—which currents and springs must unavoidably mingle strange waters with the stream of tradition.

The channel for the stream of scripture is written record—a conduit or close aqueduct—which admits no extraneous waters, and has no secret springs, and through which none of the original supply can escape—the only exceptions being the slight accidents that are incidental to even the best materials and the best workmanship.

Regarding this illustration as a just one, founded on the common-sense of the case, i. e. on the obvious nature of tradition and scripture, we see that the close channel, scripture, is a far greater security for preserving the stream of inspired truth pure as it issued from the fountain, than the open channel, tradition. We see also that if tradition be used as the sole and authoritative interpreter of scripture, it brings into it all its mixtures.

Another common-sense argument, not figurative, may be deduced from the fact that tradition and scripture are both preserved by succession.

Oral tradition is preserved by the successive teachings of successive generations of men. And we shall allow a very liberal average if we say that this teaching is responsibly begun at fifteen years of age, and ended at sixty-five. The links of oral tradition may thus be assumed to be fifty years in length. Of course, there have been more than thirty-four links between the death of St. John (A. D. 100) and the present time.

Scripture is preserved by successive manuscripts. These may last many centuries. There is a manuscript of the bible in London, and another in Rome, the age of each of which is estimated at from nine hundred to fourteen hundred years, or more; and both are said to be still in good order. Assuming an average liberally small, if I may so speak, for the duration of manuscripts, we will say they last six hundred years. The links of the manuscript succession are therefore of that length—one link for every twelve of oral tradition—not quite three links between our age and the death of St. John.

Scripture, again, is preserved by successive manuscripts of various translations, some of them of high antiquity. The links of its succession become thus like “a three-fold cord, not quickly broken.”

The tradition which was oral at first, but recorded afterwards, has a mixture of links. Assuming the year of our Lord 400 as the average dividing point—am I not gratuitously liberal in selecting so early a date?—there have been six oral, and more than two manuscript links, since the death of the last apostle—more than eight in all.*

Now, it is a dictate of common-sense, that the fewer the links in the transmission of a code, a creed, a body of truth, a collection of facts, the greater is the certainty of its being faithfully done. Scripture then is,

* A venerable friend, to whom these remarks were submitted, before they were delivered in public, is of opinion that the year 400 is much too early an average dividing point between these unwritten and written traditions of the church, and that the year 600 would be quite early enough. This date would give ten links of oral and two of written tradition—twelve in all. It would produce also other modifications, to be applied to the next paragraph of the Charge, in the comparative estimate of tradition and scripture.—My argument however is strong enough without this improvement of it.

by this argument, twelve times more certain than oral tradition, and about three times as certain as the tradition partly oral and partly recorded. Or, to state the comparison in another and juster form—at the date of the assumed average dividing point between these two kinds of tradition, the year 400, scripture was twelve times as certain as tradition—and since that time, both scriptural, and, such as they then were, traditional writings, may have transmitted with nearly equal security their respective contents. In short, vary the statement as the Romanist may choose, nay, assume other numbers as the basis of the calculation, it will still be evident that scripture is a vastly more secure method of transmitting truth than tradition.

Suppose, again, each oral communicator and each transcriber to have had an equal amount of human infirmity; then, as tradition passes through twelve links while scripture does through one, as there are twelve oral communicators for one transcriber, the chance against the evil consequences of this infirmity is twelve to one in favour of scripture. Moreover; a clear and accurate mind is required for good oral communication, whereas a very inferior understanding is sufficient in a good copyist; manuscripts therefore need never have failed through the want of competent transcribers, but oral tradition *must* often have been injured by incompetent communicators of it, whether clerical or lay: the weak minded may sometimes indeed have been corrected by the strong, but this could not always, perhaps not often, be done effectually; and when the strong minded obtained their tradition from weak instructors, the corrupting effect of a vitiated stream in the choicest parts of the channel must have greatly surpassed all possible correction. This argument, the mental qualities required in the two cases respectively, is one of incalculable weight, and it is *wholly* in favour of scripture.

If we pass from common sense to experience, we find that the mere tradition of a body of truth, or of a collection of facts, has never remained pure through many generations. This is notoriously the case with the heathen; whose ancestors inherited the religion of Noah, but who have held their tradition so badly as not to have a vestige of it left pure at the present day, in any of the numerous forms it has assumed; nay, who corrupted it so early, by “serving other gods,” that Abraham was chosen, as the instrument for the preservation of the truth, no later than between seventy and eighty years after the death of Noah, and between seventy and eighty years before the death of Shem. Even the Jews “made the [written] commandment of God of none effect through their traditions”—instead of interpreting scripture soundly, they destroyed by this means its true sense.

To allege, in the face of such experience, that Christian tradition is secure from corruption, is equivalent to asserting that a special providence, or a degree of extraordinary inspiration continuing in the church, and in the Church of Rome particularly, or some other peculiar divine

guardianship, interposes for its preservation. Something of this kind is implied in the theory of the Romanists, the infallibility of the traditions "held" by their church, and of their church in applying them to the interpretation of scripture.

One of their arguments for this theory is the necessity, considering the disputes among christians, who all appeal to scripture, of some standard of interpretation extraneous to that volume and not fallible. But there is not so great a necessity for such an earthly umpire between christian parties, as for a similar one—it is not incumbent on me to say how it should be furnished—between christians and infidels, christians and Jews, christians and the heathen, in neither of which latter cases is it alleged that such an umpire exists: the differences among the professed disciples of their common Lord are much less, and of much less importance, than those between them and the deniers of that Lord; and the argument from necessity cannot be justly used in behalf of a less exigency, while it is silent concerning greater exigencies of the same kind. Besides; the assertion of a necessity in the case is gratuitous; it takes for granted that scripture cannot be interpreted *sufficiently* for the great purpose for which it is given, the salvation of men, without an appeal to some other and infallible standard: the insufficiency of scripture for this end must be proved, before the argument from necessity can be raised. It may also be considered as much a duty, as much a part of human probation, that the christian, though to err is both possible and easy, discern and believe the truths contained in scripture, on grounds sufficient though not beyond fallibility, as that the infidel, though it is both possible and easy to remain such, discern and believe on similar grounds the truths (evidences) which lead to the reception of scripture: if such a probation is proper, no argument from necessity can, in this matter, be based on the disputes among christians.

Another argument for their theory, of an external and infallible standard, Romanists profess to derive from scripture itself; in doing which they of course allow that some passages of the sacred volume may be understood *without* the aid of the supposed infallibility which seeks to be substantiated by them. In other words, they allow, to a certain extent, that the letter of scripture may receive a common-sense interpretation, according to the usual laws of language and composition, before the infallibility of their tradition is established, and as one means of establishing it.—Reaching this point of the controversy, the Protestant is secure of its issue—as I shall now endeavour to prove.

One passage of scripture appealed to by Romanists to support their claim to an infallible tradition is from Isaiah, which, as it appears the most plausible, shall be first noticed. "My spirit which is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of

thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever."* Here is the secure oral teaching of christianity, from generation to generation, says the Romanist. This we may allow, and yet concede nothing to the argument for tradition. The preacher and the parent who teach from scripture, teach orally, as much as those do who teach from tradition; and this passage may as justly be claimed for the former as for the latter. To this effect St. James says, "ye have *heard* of the patience of Job," they doubtless had "heard" of it, the "twelve tribes" addressed by that apostle, by "words put into the mouth" of successive generations; but whence came these "words," for many generations before the apostle wrote? chiefly, if not only, from the scriptures of these "twelve tribes," several other parts of which are referred to in this epistle.

Another passage to which Romanists appeal in behalf of their claims in favour of tradition, is from Malachi. "My covenant was with him (Levi) of life and peace . . . the law of truth was in his mouth . . . for the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."† Here let us notice, in the first place, that this passage intimates nothing of general oral teaching, but only of oral teaching by the "priests." In the next place, while "the law," or written "truth," is declared to have been "in Levi's mouth," or was the basis of the oral teaching of the priests, as in the passage just quoted from Isaiah, not a word is said of interpreting that "law," the scripture, by means of tradition particularly, or indeed at all, but only of the duty of the priests to interpret "the law" faithfully, by whatever means. In the last place, we find, from the next verse, that the priests failed egregiously in this their duty, and of course that the traditional interpretation ascribed to them by Romanists, if they had any, instead of being infallible, became worthless—"but ye (priests) are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts." How important must it be, when the appointed teachers of God's truth thus "depart" from it, to have "the volume of the book," never materially corrupted, to bring back them and their flocks to that truth in its soundness and purity!

Yet another scripture appealed to by Romanists is entitled to our notice. "Go ye, teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."‡ This part of the apostolic commission declares that the Saviour would always be with his apostles and the apostolic ministry; and it implies that he would always be with their "teaching." Here however let us remark, that no one, whatever be his theory of the sacred commission, can allege that Christ promised

* Isaiah lix. 21.

† Mal. ii. 5, 6, 7.

‡ Math. xxviii. 19, 20.

to be with the teaching of every individual in that ministry, since "false apostles" and "false teachers" are several times mentioned in scripture. As little does the promise apply to traditional more than to scriptural teaching, whether by the apostles or future ministers, for not a hint is there to that effect. Neither is there a hint that tradition was to be the sole or supreme interpreter of holy writ. Apostolical teaching was, and is, and will ever be, secure: but of that teaching scripture was soon made the prominent branch, as I shall immediately prove; and it has become, through the natural failure of tradition, already illustrated in part, and to be fully exemplified as we proceed, the only teaching to be relied on as apostolical.

We are now prepared for another stage of our argument. If Romanists use the scriptures to prove that a special providence, or continued inspiration, was pledged for maintaining the absolute purity of their tradition, or to substantiate in any other way the exclusive right of their church to interpret scripture by tradition, we may use the same scriptures to prove that no such providence or inspiration was vouchsafed, or was intended to be, and to disprove the alleged right in whatever shape it may seek support from these writings. If *they* read the scriptures with the eyes of common sense, to search for the prerogative of reading them with the eyes of their church and tradition only, *we* may do the same to show that no such prerogative can be there found. This is the branch of our argument now before us.

The oral instruction of Christ and the apostles was a pure fountain. But the traditional channel sometimes betrayed its imperfection almost as soon as the apostolic teachers had left their scholars; and those inspired men gave them scripture, both for the support of tradition as far as it remained sound, and for the rectification of the mistakes fallen into through its inadequacy. The earliest tradition, therefore, excellent and valuable as it was, being the first link from inspired teaching, was not deemed infallible by the apostles, or the subject of a special providence, or of any other special interposition, that would make it such. And if this can be shown concerning its outset, its subsequent infallibility falls of course.

The very fact, that scripture was added to oral teaching, proves that the latter was not relied on as an infallible method of perpetuating the gospel. And if tradition was thus deemed, by inspired men, incompetent to the secure transmission of the gospel itself, it is gratuitous, incongruous, I had almost said absurd, to allege that it could transmit securely the interpretation of the gospel.

Besides this general disproof of the fundamental tenet of the Romanist, I shall adduce particular examples of both the aiding and the correcting of tradition by scripture.

St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians—"we beseech you, brethren,

that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, *as we commanded you.*”* About a year before, he had been in Thessalonica, and had “commanded” the brethren to do these things; which commandment became of course a Thessalonian tradition. Now, he adds scripture, not only to enforce, but to specify anew, the same duties. This tradition, therefore, was not beyond the *aid* of scripture, and of course was not infallible.

In his first epistle, Paul wrote to the same church—“of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you; for yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”† This they “knew,” and, as the apostle supposed, “knew perfectly” in the details formerly given them, which I shall presently exhibit: perhaps he meant, ‘this ye *ought* to know.’ This information concerning “the day of the Lord” was a tradition left with that church; and it was duly maintained by them, as far as the apostle was informed, when he wrote this first epistle; at the least, it ought to have been preserved. But when he writes the second, he declares that the tradition had neither sustained itself, nor proved adequate to the interpretation of the scriptural epistle he had just before sent them. This second scripture, therefore, he gives them, to *correct* the tradition, when he discovered that they ‘knew it so imperfectly.’ His language is—“we beseech you, brethren . . . that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. *Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?*”‡ Here we find it implied that a church might “not remember,” might forget, and that very soon, a tradition “told” them by an apostle. Here also we see that an apostle sends a church a scripture to *correct* a tradition as that church then held it. Here, moreover, we learn that tradition admitted so much extraneous matter, “by spirit, by word, and by letter,” if the “letter” means a forged one, and not Paul’s first epistle, as to run completely astray in the interpretation of the scripture before sent them. Here, lastly, we discover that a tradition not only *might* be “not remembered,” but actually *did* fade and lose its accuracy, in a church, about a year after the apostle had left it.

This second example is from an epistle which contains the word “tra-

* 1 Thess. iv. 10, 11.

† 1 Thess. v. 1, 2.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 1—5.

ditions,"* and which is referred to on that account by Romanists. The epistle itself proves that the oral part of these "traditions" was not infallible, either for sustaining itself, or for interpreting the scripture before given. We have to remark also that St. Paul, as soon as he sent the Thessalonians a scripture, placed *it* among the traditions or revealed instructions delivered to them—"stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." From this passage it is obvious that scripture had as good a right to interpret the fresh oral teaching of the apostle, as that fresh oral teaching could have had to interpret scripture. And the other passages just quoted inform us that the first of these two scriptures was used to aid, and the second to correct, the earliest oral tradition.

Another epistle contains this word, as appealed to by Romanists, the first to the Corinthians—"I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, (traditions, in the margin,) as I delivered them unto you."† This commendation is well regarded by some as only general language, not to be understood too literally, being qualified by subsequent rebukes. But if this absolutely restricted sense be disallowed, a little investigation will show the accuracy and the import of the distinction here made by the apostle—however these brethren may have "remembered him in all things," they certainly did not in all things "keep either the ordinances or the other traditions he had delivered to them." Far from it. Tradition betrayed its imperfection in the Corinthian church, as it had in the Thessalonian. Accordingly St. Paul, as we intimated, follows up his commendation with several weighty censures indicative of this fact.

One of these follows immediately the above passage, and relates to praying or prophesying with the head covered or uncovered, according to the sex of the speaker: in regard to which the apostle writes—"if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such *custom*, neither the churches of God."‡ The churches then had a "custom," amounting to a tradition, on this subject, and having apostolic sanction, if not indeed of apostolic institution. But in the Corinthian church, this custom or tradition had become so obscure, that the apostle gave them a scriptural declaration to *correct* it, and in fact to take its place.

Another censure, in the same chapter, relates to no less a subject than the eucharistic sacrament; and it shows that tradition was but weak even when connected with a memorial, the great christian memorial. This rite, its mode of celebration, its signification, and the due preparation for receiving it, were of course made known to every church, as soon as it was founded; and that this was done in the Corinthian church is expressly recorded—"I received of the Lord that which also

* 2 Thess. ii. 15. iii. 6.

† 1 Cor. xi. 2.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 16.

I delivered unto you," &c. Here, then, we might presume, was a tradition as strong and as perfect as possible: it certainly was fresh, since Paul had left Corinth only three or four years. Yet he writes—"when ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper." And he proceeds to deliver to them by scripture what he had before "delivered" orally, but what they had "kept" so imperfectly, the institution of this sacrament, its meaning, and the duty of self-examination before partaking of it: and if, as some suppose, the irregularities complained of arose from appending a love-feast to that ordinance, he gives them a scriptural command to abolish the appendage—"if any man hunger, let him eat at home."* How decisive are these examples of the *correction* of tradition by scripture! Their tradition concerning the very institution of the Lord's Supper, "delivered" once in full by the apostle, is corrected by this canonical epistle: and surely tradition, after so glaring a condemnation by scripture, can never claim to be the infallible interpreter of its own corrector. Their tradition also concerning the signification of the rite is corrected by this scripture. So likewise is their tradition concerning the due preparation for it. And the tradition concerning the appendage of love-feasts, if there were such a tradition in the church at the time, this scripture silences, as void of authority. How every way groundless, the opinion that tradition is infallible!

In another part of the same epistle, the Corinthian brethren are very sharply censured for the irregular use of their extraordinary gifts—"If . . . there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"† That the apostles, when they bestowed these gifts, gave not the persons thus endowed sufficient directions for their orderly use, will scarcely be maintained; that the Corinthians had been so instructed must be further presumed from the fact that Paul resided with them "a year and six months," and a "good while" longer.‡ These directions were their tradition on the subject. Yet, in a very few years, it became so feeble as to leave them to act as if "mad." And to *correct* the tradition is the object of St. Paul, in this part of this scriptural book.

This epistle furnishes yet other arguments of the same kind to the Protestant cause—"moreover, brethren, I declare [again] unto you *the gospel which I preached unto you*, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand." What Paul had "preached" orally he now writes to them, thus giving them scripture to *aid* or secure tradition, although the Corinthians thus far "stood" in it. He then adds—"by which (gospel) ye are saved, *if ye keep in memory* what I preached unto you," or, as in the margin, "*if ye hold fast* what I preached unto you;" plainly intimating that their traditional "remembrance" of the

* 1 Cor. xi. 20—34.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 23.

‡ Acts xviii. 11, 18.

gospel, or traditional "hold" upon it, might fail. The fundamental points of the "gospel" orally given them are then briefly stated—"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures..... so we preach, and so ye believed:"* this, with the proofs of the resurrection of Christ, and with, doubtless, the doctrine added of a general resurrection, was the "gospel" communicated for the traditional instruction of the Corinthian church; and as yet it was preserved by them. Why then does Paul communicate it to that church again, and in writing? himself has answered; 'lest they should not keep it in memory, and not hold it fast, securely'—some among them having already maintained "that there is no resurrection of the dead." Tradition, far from being relied on as infallible, either for its own preservation, or for preserving the interpretation of the Old Testament "scriptures" explained by Paul in connexion with this oral "gospel," received thus the help of a New Testament scripture; and the assistance rendered was in regard to the principal christian doctrines, the death of Christ for sin, and his resurrection, and that of all his people. Christian revelation in a form liable to decay was indebted for succour to christian revelation in a permanent form: and altogether unreasonable it is for the succoured to claim predominance over the succourer.†

Leaving now these books in which the word "tradition" occurs, and which have afforded ample refutation of the Romanist's argument built on that word, and ample proof of the supremacy of scripture, I proceed to notice some further examples of the same kind, found in other parts of the New Testament. Our cause, I trust, will then be perfectly secure.

St. Luke says to Theophilus, to whom he inscribes his gospel—that, as many had undertaken to set forth the things believed by christians, as they were "delivered" by those who were eye witnesses from the beginning, and ministers, "it seemed good to him also.... to write unto him in order" or distinctly—and the reason he gives is, that Theophilus "might know the certainty of the things wherein he had been instructed."‡ This person had by tradition, the things thus "delivered," whether orally; or by writings not scriptural; yet Luke prepares for him this scripture on the same topics. And why? because, as that evangelist's declaration implies, the tradition might be 'uncertain;' and because, as he explicitly asserts, scripture would enable his friend, and of course all christians, to "know the certainty of the things delivered

* 1 Cor. xv. 1--11, &c.

† This passage, from 1 Cor. xv., may receive the construction that the Corinthians were already forgetting this oral "gospel;" but the milder view I have taken is sufficient for my argument.

‡ Luke i. 1—4.

traditionally by those who were eye witnesses from the beginning." Scripture then is more "certain" than tradition, more 'firm and secure,' for such is the meaning of the word. And very natural it was that the latter should receive *aid* from the former.

A passage in the epistle to the Romans affords proof that tradition was not deemed infallible in their church in the apostolic age—"And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have *written* the more boldly unto you in some sort, as *putting you in mind*, because of the grace that is given to me of God, that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles," &c.* Behold here the condition of the Church of Rome in its earliest and purest age! Their tradition was held satisfactorily, for Paul declares that they were "filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another." But does he regard this then unimpeachable Roman tradition as infallible, beyond all uncertainty and failure? Nothing of the kind, nothing that will bear such a construction, does he say. On the contrary, though not the founder of that church, he uses his privilege as the apostle of the Gentiles at large, and "writes" to them; he gives them a scripture, for the express purpose of "putting them in mind"—i. e. to *aid* their tradition, to prevent its passing out of their minds—which implies that, without scripture, the tradition of even that eminent church might have faded and become uncertain.—I need scarcely add, that this scripture to the Romans is full of important doctrines and precepts: the articles of original sin, justification by faith, the predestination of those whom God foreknew, the divinity of Christ, make but part of its contents.

St. Peter writes his second epistle, both to put the brethren "*in remembrance*" of things which they "knew" already, and in which they were "established," and that they "might be able *after his decease* to have these things always in remembrance."† That apostle therefore did not rely on tradition for preserving his testimony of "these things," more particularly after his expected martyrdom, but set forth scripture to *aid* it, nay, we may assert, as the fair sense of his language, to take its place. Most of the Christian scriptures had indeed, by this time, been written and circulated;‡ but *his* testimony, as that of a principal witness and inspired teacher, was of high importance. So far, therefore, as those scriptures contained matter equivalent to that now written by Peter, so far would he not rely on tradition to keep "*in remembrance*," either before or "*after his decease*," his concurring testimony. And so far as he wrote additional matter, not already on the inspired record, so far would he not rely on the tradition of these brethren, though they

* Rom. xv. 15, 16, 17.

† 2 Pet. i. 12—15.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

"knew and were established in the present truth," for its perpetuation. He therefore furnished them and the whole church with this epistle, and indeed with both his epistles,* as scriptural and effectual remembrancers.

In the epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul declares that they "had always obeyed, not as in his presence only, but much more in his absence;" yet he also declares—"to *write* the same things unto you, to me indeed is not grievous, but *for you it is safe*:"† it affords you security or "certainty," the Greek word "safe" being kindred with that employed by St. Luke in the quotation just made. A body of Christians who were eminent for their obedience to this their first inspired teacher, and who of course preserved his tradition perfectly thus far, are informed that it is scripture that makes them "safe." And the scripture that gives them this information is decisive concerning the divinity of Christ, declaring that he was "in the form of God," and was "equal with God," and that "every knee must bow to him," and "every tongue confess that he is Lord." It is also decisive concerning justification by faith—"not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ." On these high doctrinal subjects did this scripture *aid* tradition of the best quality.

There are expressions in the epistle to the Ephesians which evince the superiority of scripture to tradition, as a secure means of preserving truth. St. Paul was commissioned the great apostle of the Gentiles. He had gathered many Gentiles as well as Jews into the church at Ephesus; and, as he remained there "three years," and "declared to them all the counsel of God," they must have known and understood the nature of this his commission. Is not this so probable as not to require further proof? If so, let it be noticed that, when afterwards writing his epistle, he says—"if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward"—and he presents at the same time a scriptural detail of his special relation to the Gentiles, and of the divine "counsel," once kept secret, to make them "fellow-heirs"—and of this scriptural record he remarks, "whereby, *when ye read*, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."‡ We here observe, in the first place, that "reading" a scripture is set above "hearing" oral instruction. In the next place, allowing the translation "*if ye have heard*," the language is almost sarcastic—"if you retain the least recollection of this important communication, if it made a lasting impression on you"—a most emphatic intimation that the light of tradition had, on this peculiarly interesting subject, become very feeble in the church at Ephesus, and required scripture to *aid* it, perhaps to save it from extinction. Nay, if we read the passage, as do some translators, though

* 2 Pet. iii. 1.

† Phil. ii. 12. iii. 1.

‡ Eph. iii. 2—4, &c.

not correctly in my opinion, "*seeing* ye have heard," while it decides also that they had been taught previously the special mission of Paul to the Gentiles, it still places traditional "hearing" in a disadvantageous contrast with scriptural "reading"—its implied sense is, "when ye read" this scripture, then "ye may understand" the matter sufficiently, not before. Construe the passage as we may, it adds to the proofs, now not few in number, that scripture regards tradition as inferior to itself in preserving christian revelations, and of course gives no countenance to the assertion that it can interpret those revelations infallibly.

The case of the Galatian "churches" furnishes some of the strongest proof of the position I am establishing, and is the last I shall adduce. Those churches are severely rebuked by St. Paul for their defection from the truth, as he had planted it among them, to the doctrines of the judaising brethren; in other words, for the gross failure of their tradition. His language, in various parts of the epistle to them, is to this effect—"I marvel that ye are *so soon removed* from him that called you into the grace of God *unto another gospel*"—"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"—"are ye so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"—"now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"—"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain"—"ye know how . . . I preached the gospel unto you at the first, and ye . . . received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?"—"who did hinder you, (in the margin, who did drive you back,) that ye should not obey the truth?"—"I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you."* Behold here several "churches" planted by the great apostle, and receiving from his "preaching" the pure gospel—himself "calling them into the grace of God," "setting forth before their eyes" the crucified Saviour, and "bestowing labour" upon them, and they "receiving him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus," and "speaking of their blessedness!" Behold them swerving from this gospel—tradition, though admirably begun, having its channel overflowed with strange waters, and failing most notoriously—and that, says the apostle, "so soon!" Behold scripture resorted to, to *rectify* what had gone so monstrously wrong through the fallibility of tradition!—It cannot be necessary to search for more proofs of the superior value of the written word.

Of some of the passages that have been now referred to, as well as of others not quoted,† it may perhaps be said, that they are scripture

* Gal. i. 6. iii. 1, 3. iv. 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 20. v. 7.

† Particularly in the Epistles of St. John.

helping, not only tradition, but such also of the other scriptures as were then already given. Of this I am aware; and Protestants may freely admit the fact. Scripture was not complete till the whole of it was written; and as Protestants make the comparing of scripture with scripture their great instrument of interpretation, they regard each book, when it was written and published, as having furnished, not only an additional record of the things revealed, but fresh means also of canonical exposition. In this sense, we allow the New Testament to have been imperfect, both as a volume, and as its own interpreter, till all its books were issued: much depended, at that period, on the inspired brethren, and on the oral teaching that remained pure. But tradition, to be infallible, should never be found imperfect, after its fountain was opened in the church; if at any time it require or admit the least extraneous help or amendment—and it has now been proved that it often received both—its claim to infallibility is void.

Should the ground be taken, that the church exercises a discriminating authority among traditions, retaining only those deemed sound, and rejecting the rest—we may reply, that it is proper for any church to do so, but this does not make the tradition so revised infallible; it is not beyond further revision. We may also reply, that the only means of revising tradition are earlier tradition and scripture—and that scripture, as we have seen, was used by the apostles for revising and correcting the *earliest* tradition. Scripture then is the final standard, the only standard that is beyond question.

If it be objected, that tradition may fail or be weak in some particular churches, yet be infallible in the church at large—I answer, that I have shown that there is no proof, particularly in scripture, of the infallibility of tradition in the church at large—I answer, that I have shown that it was fallible in many particular churches, nearly all to which epistles were addressed; and these are enough to present the condition, in this respect, of the church at large—I answer, that I have shown that scripture was set above even such tradition as was faultless, in churches perfectly sound; a fact which evinces that tradition was not only amended in churches casually in error, but was not trusted in the best churches: and if not in these, it certainly was not in the church at large—I answer, that I have shown that even faultless tradition was not relied on in the early Roman church; and we cannot allow that the later Roman church, however it affect to represent or to govern the church at large, has made its once fallible tradition infallible.

And it will not avail the Romanist to plead a distinction between doctrines and the other branches of religion, and merely allege that tradition has been kept infallible as an interpreter of the former. We have seen that St. Paul used scripture to aid the tradition of the Corinthian church in regard to the doctrines of the death of Christ for sin,

and of his resurrection and ours—and to correct the tradition of the Galatian churches in regard to the multifarious doctrinal errors of Judaism. We have seen how much doctrine St. Paul set forth in a scriptural form for the benefit of the early Roman church, deeming it proper thus to “put them in mind,” or keep alive their accurate recollection, of these things, though their traditional knowledge of them was as yet unobscured. We have seen that St. Paul deemed it “safe” to give the Philippian church, which had been endoctrinated by himself, and which held his tradition most commendably, a scripture asserting the doctrine of our Lord’s divinity, besides other important articles of belief. We have seen that St. Luke wrote his entire gospel, containing much doctrine, that a Christian might “know the certainty of the things in which he had been instructed” by tradition. Tradition therefore preserves doctrines no better than other matters.

We may now safely conclude that none of these departments of tradition have proved infallible—and, as a consequence, that no special providence, or permanent inspiration, or other divine interposition, was pledged, or has acted, for the infallible preservation of any of them among Christians. The Being, who only could exert the power required for this purpose, has taught us, in his written word, that He did *not* exert it, but that traditions pure at first, as coming directly from the apostles, very soon became imperfect in various churches, and of course were not above imperfection in any. And it follows as an unavoidable result—a result as momentous as it is clear—that no one who believes that written word, in its plain and obvious sense, can also believe that the traditions we speak of are infallible: to maintain this is to contradict the scriptures; to agree with scripture, that proposition must be denied. From this conclusion I see no escape.

My appeal in this portion of the argument has been to scripture in its common-sense interpretation, i. e. according to the meaning of its language deduced in conformity with ordinary and natural principles—as distinguished from any interpretation given it under the plea of exclusive or special authority to do so, whether by the Church of Rome, or any other church or body of men, and whether under the guidance of tradition or otherwise. Besides that it is folly to assert that the written words are but empty signs and marks, indicating the letter only of the bible, not indicating its sense—for they are marks and signs which in their very nature are *associated* with meaning—Romanists themselves use scripture in their attempts to substantiate the alleged infallibility of their church; and they obviously can use it only on this common-sense principle of interpretation, because there is no other rule till that allegation is established. The Protestant cause has now made precisely the same appeal to scripture, and has there found that tradition, at the very best, was fallible.

It is due to the subject to add, that the fallibility of tradition, though fatal to its extravagant claims, does not imply its immediate general corruption. Hence we find that, so far as the traditions of the apostolic age remained sound, they were treated by scripture with the greatest deference. The first teaching of the churches was oral, and for some years they had no other. And when scriptures were added, they recognised the validity of all the traditional gospel which as yet was pure: so that the written gospel took its place, not by ejecting it entirely or generally, though from what we have seen it appears to have done so in part, but as a consequence of its natural decay. Of this recognition of the sound traditional gospel, sometimes perhaps by itself, and sometimes as combined with the scriptures then beginning to be published, I shall adduce a few examples.

St. Paul says to the Thessalonian church—"we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandment we gave you by the Lord Jesus"—"stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle"—"withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." To the Colossian church he writes—"as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." To the Philippian church—"those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do." To the Roman church—"I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." St. Jude declares—"ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." St. Peter "testifies"—"this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand." And St. John, in fixing the lasting denunciation of scripture on the error of denying the Son, enjoins—"let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning"—and again, "this is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."*

From such passages we learn that sound christian tradition was, in the first century, regarded as divine truth; and such of course it remained as long as it continued sound. But ample proof has been given, from other passages, that it often lost its soundness in a few years, and was aided and corrected by scripture: and this amounts also to scriptural authority for the inference, that it would be liable to greater deterioration as more years should elapse—scripture thus confirming what has already

* 1 Thess. iv. 1, 2. 2 Thess. ii. 15. iii. 6. Col. ii. 6, 7. Phil. iv. 9. Rom. xvi. 17. Jude, 3. 1 Pet. v. 12. 1 John, ii. 24. 2 John, 6.

been shown from the nature of tradition and from facts. After the death therefore of the inspired men who could decide respecting a tradition when it was doubted, no appeal, or no final appeal remained but to scripture; nowhere else could it be securely ascertained what had been "heard from the beginning." The record even of a tradition, made by the Fathers after inspiration had ceased, was only as pure as was the tradition itself at the time it was so recorded; in no questioned case could it be absolutely relied on; and if scripture threw light on the disputed point, it was to be preferred, not only for its greater certainty, but also as both an earlier and an inspired record of that tradition. If however a tradition received as apostolical, or the record of it as such by a Father, was nowhere doubted in those primitive ages, and was in no respect contrary to scripture, it had sufficient authority, it was accredited revelation.

But there may be doubts concerning the interpretation of the Fathers, in their uninspired records of tradition. We hold, for example, that episcopacy has ample testimony in these records; but some deny that we give the proper meaning to the language of the Fathers on this subject. How far such an objection can be sustained by a fair construction of their writings, is not included in my present inquiry. But on the supposition—let me rather say, on the concession, for argument's sake, that the doubt is not gratuitous, the only appeal that remains is to scripture.—So when the Romanist would glean from some of the Fathers the slender authority they may seem to contain for denying the equality of the apostles and of bishops, and for asserting the supremacy of St. Peter and of the bishop of Rome—besides objecting, that these are not the earliest Fathers, and that the tradition, if it existed, was of course late and impure—besides showing that the Romanist's interpretation of these traditional records, such as they are, is unsound and unfair—besides adducing similar, and earlier, and better traditional authority of an opposite tenor—we appeal to scripture as the final arbiter; and show that Peter had neither supremacy, nor even primacy, in office, since James presided in a council when he was present; and also that he had not supremacy in deciding controversies, since at Antioch Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed," because he "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel," and gave him a doctrinal lesson of much importance, "before them all," and with even sharpness of censure.* All this the word of God records of Peter. It is foreign however to my present undertaking to enter largely into particular illustrations.

The principles involved in this portion of my argument may be thus stated. 1. If any tradition be in anywise contrary to scripture, it is

* Acts xv. 6, 13, 19. Gal. ii. 11, 14, &c.

void, the greater authority cancelling the less when in opposition to it. 2. If there be an absolutely unquestioned tradition, clearly traceable to the apostolic age, the matter of which is asserted in scripture also, the authority in the case must be accounted two-fold; that of the written word, however, being from its nature the more excellent of the two. But of this I know no examples that will be allowed to be perfect now, though there were several a few centuries ago; questions having then and since arisen concerning the sense of various passages in the Fathers—questions which, though they existed not before in such a shape as to make them worthy of notice, have now respectable supporters: the final appeal, beyond that of the due construction of the Fathers, is, as I have already said, to scripture. 3. If there be an absolutely unquestioned tradition, the matter of which is not found in scripture, or believed not to be there, yet in no degree contrary to scripture, and clearly traceable to the apostolic age, it must be regarded as having such authority without scripture as belongs to the case. Of this, the substitution of the Lord's day for the old sabbath will probably be deemed the best example, by those who think they do not find scriptural warrant for the change. Yet even this example is not perfect, as it is controverted by some Christians: one reply is, that they do not rightly construe the traditional records in point, or do not allow due authority to a tradition traceable to the apostles; but another and better reply is, that the New Testament agrees with this tradition, as it affords intimations that the Lord's day had taken the place of the old sabbath before that volume was written.

These remarks suggest two more. The first is, that, happily for Protestants, no part of their creed rests on the insecure basis of the tradition we have described; they can appeal, on all points, to the infinitely superior authority of scripture, to either its plain assertions, or its sufficient intimations: scripture contains all things which they believe necessary to salvation. The second remark is, that, from its natural insufficiency, nothing of tradition, that is not absorbed in scripture, remains absolutely unquestioned; and hence, practically speaking, though we consult it, and especially its earlier records, as we would similar authority in other cases, THE ONLY FINAL RESORT IS TO SCRIPTURE. There only can we find a secure means of ascertaining the Rule of Faith—the teaching of Christ and his inspired servants.

If it be objected that scripture does not suffice for the settling of disputes, I answer, neither does tradition, neither does any thing: hence St. Paul says to the Corinthians, among whom tradition was fresh, and to whom he sent also at the same time a scripture—"if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant"—"if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost"—and St. Peter speaks of those who "are willingly igno-

rant:”* in other words, there are mistakes and delusions for dispelling which not even revelation will suffice. I further answer, that, though the providential permission of error is a mystery, it is not so great a one as the providential permission of evil: and there is no more infallible remedy for error, than there is for sin; there cannot be, as long as the mind and the will are free, and the due exercise of that freedom is part of our probation. The discipline of the church was indeed to be inflicted on the obstinate, and may still be, for error as well as for sin—and that, on the principle that the church, being “the pillar and ground of the truth,” is under obligation to maintain doctrinal as well as practical purity, as far as she is able. This the church has also a right to do, for her own peace. This the church has a right to do, as the magisterial expounder of christian law. This the church has a further right to do, because whatsoever and whomsoever she justly binds or looses on earth, they are bound or loosed in heaven. But this, all this, is not to be confounded with the claim to settle a controversy concerning truth on the principle of infallibility. A civil legislature or magistrate, representing the sovereignty of a nation, has final authority in this world, yet the best may exercise it erroneously.† And though the church represents, so far as this discipline requires, the divine sovereignty of Christ, yet as the representative is but human, she must form her decisions, and enforce them, under the consciousness that she is never beyond the liability to mistake.

MY REV. BRETHREN,

In the hope that the remarks now offered you may not be without their value, when the claims of the church of Rome are brought into notice, let me ask you, when meeting such an exigency, to give them a place, if you deem them worthy of it, with the other, more elaborate and more learned, arguments on the subject. The extensive range of erudition usually brought into this discussion, when conducted with

* 1 Cor. xiv. 38. 2 Cor. iv. 3. 2 Pet. iii. 5.

† A friend of the highest professional eminence allows me to insert the following remarks.

“To give another illustration. A judicial tribunal, acting in the last resort, must act with authority in the matter in controversy, and also upon all questions involved in it. This is not, however, on the principle of infallibility, but on the principle of order or due subordination in the administration of justice. It does not preclude the correction of any error of doctrine, which upon subsequent examination the sentence may be found to contain, upon its application to other cases—a correction which can never be made, if the virtue of the sentence is held to reside in the infallibility of the tribunal. If it were a postulate of law, that a judicial tribunal in the last resort is infallible, it must follow, that unless the tribunal were equally so in fact, error, even involuntary error, would perpetuate itself; and his objection appears to have no less force against the imputed infallibility of the Church.”

calmness and dignity, makes it difficult to present the controversy to our flocks in an acceptable and effectual manner, however circumstances require it: they are apt to feel as but spectators, distant spectators, of a conflict in which arms are wielded which they have never "proved." But in what has now been said, the issue, and, let me repeat it, the *fundamental* issue, is brought within the range of all sound understandings which have submitted themselves to the faith of Christ.

Permit me also to remind you, and let me ask you to remind your flocks, if occasion shall require, that the exercise of our freedom in matters of faith, or, as it has been called, the right of private judgment, is part of our probation—is one of the deepest and most solemn of our responsibilities, for our conduct under which God will most assuredly bring us into judgment—our private judgment must undergo his sovereign judgment. I will not detain you for an investigation of the rules for exercising this liberty of conscience judiciously and safely. It belongs, however, to the subject before us, to remark, that a very prominent rule in the case is—the authority of the Church—not as an infallible judge, but as much less fallible than any of her members individually—not as having "dominion over our faith," but as the guardian "helper of our joy"—not as a "mistress," but as "the mother of us all." Wild notions of the right of private judgment, in matters of religion, are fruitful of mischiefs, though they may not resemble the mischiefs produced by the claim of the Church of Rome that we surrender it. And Protestants are especially bound so to exercise this right, that those "of the contrary part in this matter may have nothing evil to say of them." While they reject the domination of an usurper, let them not imagine that there is no principle of dependance involved in the conduct of the mind, and in the investigation of moral truth and moral certainty.

A due appreciation of the fact, that the discreet exercise of our judgment in articles of faith is part of our probation, will guard us against yielding to the scepticism which sometimes tempts us, when we find that only moral certainty can be attained, not infallible certainty, in either the evidences of scripture, or its interpretation. Right views also of this probation, the duty of seeking, discerning, embracing truth, though beset by the plausibilities of error, will show the propriety of the assertion, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." It is no begging of the question, but the inducing of a natural inference, to assert that a revelation from God concerning sin and holiness will be best understood, and its certainty best apprehended, by those who, other qualifications being equal, most resemble God in character—for these, the godly, more than others, will see these things as God sees them—though the proof is the same to all, the godly have superadded this peculiar confirmation of their faith. The gospel revealed for the salvation of sinners is adapted, by the Deity, to their

case; and this case the convinced and reclaimed sinner understands better than those who have not yet thus “done the will” of their heavenly Father: the spiritual discernment he has acquired by spiritual experience opens to him a testimony, unperceived by other inquirers, that “the doctrine is of God.” This testimony of the soul to divine truth is like that of “clay to the seal.”

NOTE FOR PAGE 6.

Tradition may mean--

1. The *thing* delivered for keeping, or the subject matter communicated or transmitted. This is the usual sense of the word in scripture.

2. The *instrument* of delivery and transmission--either, 1. oral communication--or, 2. written and especially scriptural communication. (See 1 Pet. i. 18. Luke i. 2.)

3. The instruments *first used*, of either of these kinds, which were superior--or those of the respective kinds *subsequently used*, which were inferior. The autographs of scripture were better than copies of them--and the first oral teaching was better than the immediate repetition of it, and infinitely better than most of the unaided later repetitions of it.

4. The *proof* of the genuineness or soundness of either of these instruments at any given date--either, 1. oral tradition attesting its own continuing soundness--or, 2. oral tradition attesting the soundness or genuineness of a writing--and a modification of the latter is, both oral and recorded tradition attesting the soundness or genuineness of scripture.

Here are seven senses of the word, each tradition being different from the rest, either in its nature, or in consequence of the difference of subjects or circumstances. The word is used also, and too generally, in a loose manner. The author fears it may sometimes have been so used in the Charge; as this Note is the result of reflections and investigations subsequent to those which led to its composition.

It will be observed, that oral tradition has no attestation from without of its continued soundness; having no witness but itself, frail as this sort of it is; the record of an oral tradition showing only what it was at the time of making the record, not what it was before--while scripture *has* extraneous attestation of its genuineness, that furnished by tradition, of the least fallible kind, and both oral and recorded. These facts are a further illustration and proof of the superiority of scripture.









